

Ask the Right Questions

Back to basics: Understanding Questions

Types of Questions

Basically, there are two types of questions. When formulating your questions consider the extent and level of detail necessary.



1 Open

Open questions prompt the respondent to provide details.

Use these questions to start a conversation or discussion, gain additional insights, obtain the person's perspective on a topic, or gather both sides of a story.

How does an open question start?

How Where
Tell me Which
What Who
When Why

Examples

How do you find inspiration?
What is your opinion of the data in this report?
Tell me what you would do differently.

2 Closed

Typically, a respondent can answer a closed question with one word or short phrase: yes, no, always, not today.

Use these questions when you want to control the conversation, ask for a call to action or decision, confirm understanding or set the stage for the conversation.

Misuse of closed questions can shut down a conversation.



How does an closed question start?

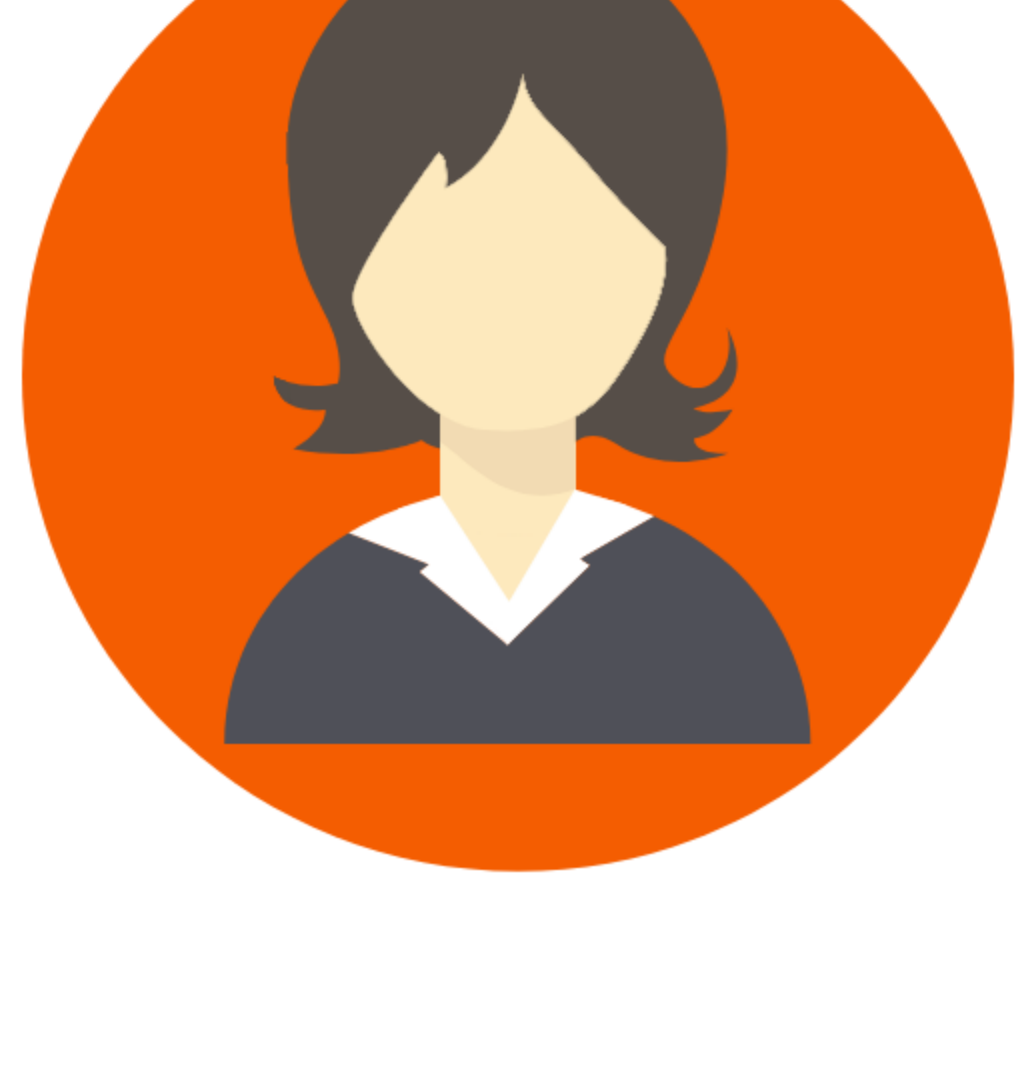
Is (Are) Has (Have/Had)
Do (Did) Will (Would)
Can

Examples

Is it subjective or objective?
Did you call the client yesterday?
Have you traveled abroad?

Question Strategies

These strategies help you manage the conversation and obtain the necessary details. When selecting a strategy consider the respondent, your relationship with the respondent and the information necessary to proceed.



1 Probing or Inquiry

Typically, this strategy uses open questions to obtain details or the "whole" story.

Use caution with this strategy. It can put the respondent on the defensive, which undermines the conversation. The 5 Whys is a version of this strategy. Use it sparingly.

2 Leading

This strategy involves asking closed questions to lead the person to your way of thinking. The question can include an assumption or personal appeal.

An effective strategy is giving the respondent a choice between 2 or 3 options.



3 Funneling or Drilling down

Typically, this strategy involves asking general, closed questions in the beginning of the conversation, then transitioning to open questions.

Use this strategy to learn more details or gain the respondent's interest or confidence.

The Power of Questions

By selecting the right strategy for your questions, you can accomplish a variety of results.



Gather Details

Questions are a powerful tool to learn more and obtain specific details.

Examples

What happened during the dinner?

Tell me more about...



Build Relationships

Asking for someone's opinion or inputs using a positive question framework helps build relationships.

Examples

How can we improve the sales process?

What should we keep doing?



Manage or Coach

Asking questions helps the person reflect and commit to actions for change or improvement.

Examples

What should be your next step?

How would you handle this situation differently in the future?



Gain Clarity

By asking questions, you can confirm your assumptions and identify any lapses in information.

Examples

What happened next?

How often does this happen?



Persuade Others

Instead of making statements, ask questions. People like their own ideas. Naturally, the respondent believes in their own answer.

Examples

Should we hire someone to plan this client's event?

You make a great point, but have you considered....

Ask the Right Questions

By selecting the right strategy, you can harness the power of questions.

Sources:

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